

A WILD DOG FROM BRITISH NEW GUINEA.

By C. W. De VIS, M.A.

THE drawing (plate i.) represents, approximately, an example of the dog made known to us by His Excellency Sir William MacGregor, while Lieutenant-Governor of British New Guinea, in his Annual Report for the year 1897-8, p. 27. On 26th October, 1897, His Excellency was on Mount Scratchley, at an elevation of 7,000 feet. He remarks that "Animals are rare," and, summarising the mammalian fauna observable, includes "wild dog" in the list. We may safely infer that in that locality the dog is rare. Whether it is so or has ever been observed in other localities I do not know, but have reason to think that it has not. The mounted skin, which allowed the artist to form a more or less true conception of the living animal, had long been macerating in alcohol, and was entirely boneless; naturally it baffled the utmost cunning of our late taxidermist in his effort to endow it with a semblance of life. Fortunately it was accompanied by the skeleton, which had been removed from it, and from the two we are able to see pretty clearly what were the form and proportions, clothing and colour, of the dog in its living state.

Its size is that of one of the smaller breeds of our domestic dogs; the body deep and long, measuring over head from tip of nose to root of tail $25\frac{1}{2}$ inches (650 mm.), the legs strong and short, the height at the shoulder being but $11\frac{1}{2}$ inches (290 mm.), the leg itself 7 inches (173 mm.); a comparatively small head with a narrow and deep muzzle is borne on a short thick neck; the eyes moderate in size, are slightly oblique; the ears rather short, erect; the tail reaching to the middle of the lower leg; the mammae 10 (2 pectoral, 8 inguinal); dew claw none. The hair on the body is short and closely adpressed, without under-fur; on the neck it is longer, forming a ruff between the shoulder and ear; on the tail the hairs are long and towards the end rather bushy. Colour, black and white, the black predominant; the white portions are a long

irregular patch on the nape, another covering the chin, throat, and breast, and contracting to a point on the abdomen; the paws, left tarsus, and tip of tail are white also; the inguinal region tawny white. There is much about this animal compelling one to believe that though truly called a "wild dog" it is not a "truly wild dog"; in other words, that there was a time when its forbears were not wild. A small head on a bulky body, both mounted on short legs, together with a coat of contrasted colours, are features which are certainly not the rule among indigenous members of the family Canidæ. But if we decide that this dog is merely feral, of a domestic breed run wild, as dogs are apt to do, how are we to account for its habitat on Mount Scratchley? So far as I am aware, the present natives of the island possess no tame breed of dog similar to this—none, therefore, from which this could have departed. If this be so, it is only reasonable to conclude that New Guinea has been peopled by a pre-existing race, and one sufficiently advanced to cultivate varieties among its canine companions and hybridise them. We already have sufficient proofs, in relics now venerated as fetishes, that such a race once existed—a race who manufactured pottery of a grade superior to that now achieved by existing Papuan art, and elegantly fashioned mullers for grinding seeds, putting to shame the water-worn stones that content the present folk. What grand changes, geological, climatological, zoological, botanical, New Guinea and Australia have experienced since the muller that sank into the old river-bed in Woodlark Island was new from the hands of its maker!



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